

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 11, 2018

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum:

We write in order to request that your Subcommittee include provisions in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill which reflect the land acquisition priorities of the Trump Administration as described in the President's FY19 Budget Request in addition to the U.S. Department of the Interior's and the U.S. Forest Service Budget Justification documents.

Specifically, we request that:

- Total FY19 appropriations for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Land Acquisition account be reduced to \$6,953,000 – a reduction of \$46,886,000 from the FY 2018 enacted level, including approximately \$12 million in new budget authority and \$5 million in cancellations of prior year balances.
- Total FY19 appropriations for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Land Acquisition account be reduced to \$3,393,000 – a reduction of \$21,523,000 from the FY 2018 enacted level, with an additional \$10,000,000 in cancellation of prior year balances for a total appropriation of negative \$6,607,000.
- Total FY19 appropriations for the National Parks Service (NPS) Land Acquisition account be reduced to \$0 – a reduction of \$46,935,000, with an additional \$10,000,000 in cancellation of prior year balances for a total appropriation of negative \$10,000,000.
- Total FY '19 appropriations for the United States Forest Service (USFS) Land Acquisition account be reduced to \$850,000 – a reduction of \$63,487,000.

In defending these proposed levels, FWS stated, "The budget reflects the Administration's priority to support management of existing lands and resources above acquisition of new Federal lands... In 2019, FWS will focus on completing enacted acquisitions and acquiring inholdings that enhance operational efficiency." In a similar vein, BLM stated "The 2019 budget focuses available funds on the protection and management of existing lands and assets... The budget supports the Inholdings, Emergencies, and Hardships program, providing BLM with the ability to acquire high priority parcels in very limited and special situations." NPS justification echoed the same sentiment: "The President's 2019 Budget focuses available funds on the protection and management of existing lands and assets. Acquiring new lands is a lower priority than funding ongoing operations and maintenance and there is no request for major land acquisition projects in FY 2019."

The United States Federal Government is the largest landowner in the nation by far, holding title to roughly 640 million acres, or approximately 28% of the acreage of the United States. The BLM on its own manages nearly 250 million of that acreage while additionally administering roughly 700 million acres of federal subsurface mineral estate. These massive and continually-expanding estates pose correspondingly overwhelming challenges for land-managing agencies. The deferred maintenance backlog for the NPS, for example, totals nearly \$12 billion. That of the USFS is hovering around \$5.5 billion; FWS and the BLM carry backlog responsibilities of approximately \$1.5 billion and \$0.81 billion, respectively.

As these figures show, the total land stewardship responsibility of the federal government is incredible. The government understandably encounters extreme difficulty in executing its responsibility to manage existent lands and assets while also facilitating public access – at all, let alone effectively. Given the mounting challenges, exacerbated by preceding years' land acquisition appropriations, it defies common sense that Congress would even consider maintaining the status quo land management posture of the Obama Administration by continuing to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars into land acquisition each fiscal years – **and when the federal government is already derelict in its management of the lands it presently owns.** The story of federal land management over the last several decades is of the dog that bit off more than he can chew. The only way to improve the next chapter of that poor dog's story is to make sure he is given the requisite time to chew on this bite before he's offered another.

Don't just take it from us. The current Administration – with its close working knowledge of the day-to-day details of our troubling maintenance backlog woes – is issuing a stark request that we adhere to its assessments and prioritize proper management of lands already in the federal inventory. This entails a simple solution: that Congress repurposes funds which in previous appropriations cycles have been put towards land acquisition into those accounts which instead will aid in the rehabilitation of the federal land inventory.

The account totals requested in the President's FY19 budget reflect sums which will facilitate the completion of land acquisition projects already underway as well as leaving aside sufficient funding for emergency or necessary land acquisition. Rest assured, issues that "come up" urgently will be covered. And while there will always be new prospective projects in the queues of each of the agencies in question, it isn't always the right time to act on them. We submit to you that *now*, in fact, is precisely the wrong time to unleash another deluge of land acquisition funding – at a moment when the total inventory and its backlog threatens to completely overwhelm the federal land management agencies. We must get responsible on this issue.

Good land stewards and good appropriators are united by the principle of responsibility. In this case, however, the actions of the latter significantly determine the outcomes of the former. What is responsible, therefore, is that Congress untie the hands of public land agencies by allowing them to focus on the inventory already possessed. Guaranteeing yet another year of purely counterproductive, unrestrained land purchases, on the other hand, is contrary to the public interest and a violation of its trust. It represents a mind-numbing Congressional commitment to the senseless growth of growing the federal estate while ignoring the cries of local communities, out-of-control federal spending and the priorities of the sitting Administration.

Accordingly we ask that you adjust the four agency accounts referenced above in accordance with the President's FY19 budget request.

We appreciate your consideration of such appropriations for inclusion in the FY19 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress



Rob Bishop
Member of Congress



Louie Gohmert
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



Tom McClintock
Member of Congress



Ron Estes
Member of Congress